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Book review

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Chris Shilling, *Changing Bodies: Habit, Crisis and Creativity*. London: SAGE, 2008, 206 pp. incl., bibliog. and index, £24.99, ISBN: 9781412908320.

Reviewed by: Bethany Simmonds, *University of Chichester, UK*

Changing Bodies: Habit, Crisis and Creativity is the latest contribution by Chris Shilling, which attempts to revitalize the use of pragmatism, offering new implications for the sociological study of the body. Shilling begins in the first part of this book by introducing his innovative use of the theoretical approach, pragmatism. In the second part of this book, Shilling then convincingly uses this approach to draw together a range of disparate topics, from sporting bodies, transsexualism, migration, chronic illness and prisoner of war experiences to religious practice, within one coherent framework. Pragmatism emphasizes the internal and external environments and the ways in which habit, crisis and creativity shape people's corporeality. This book has a similar format to another of his contributions, entitled, *The Body in Culture, Technology and Society* (2005), in which he uses corporeal realism as his analytical framework and typology. In addition, *Changing Bodies* develops further his longstanding interests in re-establishing the centrality of the body in sociology, in body modification and transformation in 'high modernity'.

In the first section of this book, the author sets out his theoretical framework. For instance, Chapter 2, 'Embodying Social Action', outlines the contribution that pragmatism makes to the scholarship of the body. First, he examines how pragmatism frames individual action within an external social and physical milieu, inasmuch as individual action is performed in response to an audience or 'generalized other' (Mead, 1962), and the ways in which bodies and actions are shaped by interaction with the physical environment, as well as, how the internal environment of the body is also pivotal to understanding social action. For example, survival instincts, such as the need for food, shelter and water, are programmed into our brains, prompting our senses to develop and react to the changing environment. Finally, the author proposes that pragmatism views individual action as continuous but, in different stages of embodied action, determined by the dynamics of the social and physical environment. According to pragmatism, these different stages are habit, crisis and creativity.

Habit refers to the routinized behaviours that individuals participate in, in order to cope with their surroundings. Habits bring together the social, physical and biological aspects of individual reality. However, according to pragmatism, habits can inhibit or enable an individual's interaction with the social world. For example, 'bad habits' delimit individual action, but habits are also required in order for learning to take place. Moreover,

for these habits to be 'intelligent', they must be flexible and responsive to changing social and physical environments. This conscious and adaptable concept of habit is almost contradictory to the version of habit theorized as engrained and semi-automatic, outlined earlier in this section. There are however, circumstances, nevertheless, where even 'intelligent' habits are blocked and behaviour shifts from habit to crisis. Crisis occurs either as a result of a mismatch between the physical and social environment and the internal individual's needs, or is a crisis within an environment. Crisis is a significant rupture in one's identity, where self-doubt of capability creeps in and habitual behaviours are no longer effective. Shilling uses ageing as an example of a crisis within an individual's internal environment, where individual action and biological needs are out of synchronicity. However, the reviewer would like to point out that experiencing ageing as an internal crisis is certainly not universal. Nevertheless, the author states that, although crisis is not welcomed by individuals, it can lead to change and creativity. This is experienced as a heightened emotional epiphany moment, where there is a realization that new opportunities are possible and harmony is felt between the individual, social action and the environment. When comparing the theory of pragmatism with Bourdieu's work on 'habitus', the author argues that pragmatism and the work of Bourdieu differ inasmuch as Bourdieu does not propose that habitual behaviour can be reversed, as it is subconscious, whereas pragmatism theorizes that the individual is always caught between routinized behaviour and change. Furthermore, pragmatism argues that 'creativity' is produced as a result of interaction between the individual and the environment. However, the opportunity for change is not a characteristic of Bourdieu's theory of habitus and is another point of divergence with pragmatism.

Unlike the work of Bourdieu and the Chicago School, pragmatism, has not been adopted by sociology, and, more specifically, by the sociology of sport. With his theory of embodiment, Bourdieu has been described as one of the few eminent sociologists who have taken the sociology of sport seriously (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006), capturing the imagination of scholars throughout sociological disciplines. The Chicago School's ethnographic approach to social research has also influenced sociological approaches, including sociological approaches to sport (see Howe, 2001; Messner, 1990, amongst many others). However, pragmatism, has received far less attention within mainstream sociology and, subsequently, the sociology of sport. In Chapter 3, the author outlines the contribution that pragmatism has and can make to the discipline of sociology. Shilling historically grounds pragmatism in the Chicago School of Sociology and accounts for the decline in the influence of pragmatism on sociological research. First, this, he says, is due to the lack of attention given to the Chicago School's work on embodiment and, second, because of the emphasis placed upon Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism and not the physical dimensions of his theory. Finally, he accounts for declining interest in pragmatism as due to Parson's Cartesian division and subsequent emphasis on the social. He then uses work entitled *The Hobo* (Anderson, 1923–1924), to exemplify a pragmatist's approach to embodied social action which reflects upon the internal and changing external environments, due to the rapid industrialization, urbanization and immigration taking place in Chicago at the time. The study tracked a homeless man, who is employed in migratory work based in Chicago. Shilling then discusses the decline of the prominence of the body, contributed to by three factors: first, the perception that

researching the body was 'low status', second, that the incidence of sexual scandals, which resulted in the dismissal of Chicago School members, and third, the diminished influence that the Chicago School had on sociological literature more generally. Finally, although Shilling acknowledges the ongoing influence that the 'second Chicago school' had on the sociology of the body, the author also attributes the return of the body to growing interest in changing technologies, consumerism, identity, feminism and governmentality, which is an argument also outlined in Shilling (2005).

The following three chapters focus on how the technologically advanced globalized world enables social action. Chapter 4, 'Competing', provides a thorough historical overview of literature on the sociology of sport, discussing a typology conceptualizing sports into 'Natural sports', 'Socialized sports' and 'Performative sports'. Shilling argues that, as sport has developed over time, it has slowly disassociated itself from the original need for survival and, instead, become increasingly rationalized. Shilling proposes that there appears to be a contradiction in Performative sport, where rationalized physical and social environments both delimit and facilitate creativity, but, instead, he argues that both are true in different phases of learning a sporting skill. For example, in the motor competence stage, effective habitual movements are developed, whereas, in autonomous proficiency, athletes can creatively adapt the routine movements to subtle changes in the external environment. At the highest level, this is experienced as a spiritual experience, also referred to as 'flow'. Therefore, Shilling argues that routine and creative actions are not in opposition to each other but, instead, both are required for optimal performance to occur. Other outcomes of highly rationalized, deeply constraining approaches to Performative sports are general malaise, injuries, and the consumption of performance-enhancing drugs, leading to experiences of crisis in identity. There is a growing popularity, in the West, for physical practices which focus on experience from Eastern traditions, such as tai chi. Tai chi cultivates a different mind, body relationship that can be likened to the idea of flow in Performative sports. However, Performative sports are linked to the work culture whereas tai chi emphasizes the intelligent adaptation of the body to different environments. Fostering very different relationships between internal and external environments of embodied action and thus, it allows a more harmonious interaction with the natural world.

Chapter 5, 'Presenting', examines the experience of people of transgender or 'transpeople', who use social action as the basis of their presentation of self and gender. Shilling examines the theorization of the body as a container for the sexual self, which needs to be physically changed to reflect the inner gendered self. Shilling presents the stages of social action with regard to the identity crisis associated with being a transgendered person in a two-sex model, including the creative action that develops as a result of this crisis and the ways in which gender is performed through habits. Chapter 6, 'Moving', examines the phenomenon of the global migration of three disadvantaged groups, which he calls the 'dispossessed'. They are refugees and asylum seekers, those sold as slaves and forced to work and legal or illegal economic migrants. Shilling examines how their movement results in a crisis of identity in which the performance of habits helps to re-establish links with their former community. In addition, creative social action that is also shared with others provides them with a source of stability.

The next three chapters are more anthropologically based on the experiences of being restricted by the social, physical and internal environments. Chapter 7, 'Ailing', is the

first of three chapters focusing on the restrictive nature of both external and internal environments from a more anthropological perspective and is centred on experiences of chronic illness. Shilling sets these experiences within the Western cultural and social environment, which is obsessed by youth and develops technologies to delay the inevitable onset of illness and death. In addition, Shilling argues that society has shifted from a 'sick role' to a 'health role', providing the legitimization of the surveillance of populations. Furthermore, he illustrates that experiencing chronic illness presents a crisis to one's identity, illustrates how creative strategies are used to cope and explains how the re-establishment of habits helps to reconstitute identities. Chapter 8, entitled 'Surviving', was particularly interesting as it examines the experiences of survivors of the Nazi concentration camps and the Soviet gulag work camps. Here, Shilling proposes that these case studies support the concept of 'inverted Cartesianism'. He argues that humans, in circumstances where the social habits, which construct social identities, have been confiscated, are reduced to biological processes. Chapter 9, 'Believing', examines the development of new religious practices, such as Islamic fundamentalism and 'new age' spiritualism, and the extent to which they use belief systems to resist an encroaching technological Western culture. He argues that rationality has led to a crisis of identity, in which creative social action such as religious conversion has led to a new set of embodied religious routines.

In conclusion, Shilling successfully employs pragmatism as a useful and original analytical framework, which can be applied to the study of embodied social action. He attempts to overcome the problems of Structuration theory, by providing a holistic understanding of individual action within a social and physical context, without reducing social action to the individual or to the social structure. The disparate case studies provide overviews of substantial topics, and, as a result of applying pragmatism's phases of social action, which are habit, crisis and creativity, form a repetitive and somewhat predictable structure. On the other hand, Shilling concludes by drawing together the case studies around three themes, including, first, the importance of attending to the body in order to transcend bodily needs and social experiences, second, the ways in which the body can be neglected and, subsequently, gives up on life, and third, how individuals transcend their bodies in order to focus on collective action for the members of their community. It will be interesting to see what analytical framework he will advocate next. The reviewer recommends this book to sociology of the body scholars, as it provides a comprehensive overview of a wide range of contemporary corporeal case studies framed in a stimulating and novel way.

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